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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 141744Z NOV 08
FM UNESCO PARIS FR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO RUCNSCO/UNESCO COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS FR 002105

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OEXC](#) [UNESCO](#) [KEDU](#) [FR](#) [IZ](#) [QA](#) [JO](#) [USAID](#)

SUBJECT: UNESCO HOSTS EDUCATION CONFERENCE ON IRAQ

11. Summary: On October 30 - November 1, 2008 UNESCO and the First Lady of Qatar, Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned, hosted the International Conference on the Right to Education in Crisis-Affected Countries entitled "Stop Jeopardizing the Future of Iraq" in Paris. Director General Matsuura opened the conference, which brought together 150-200 participants from multi-lateral organizations, NGO's and members of the academic community in Iraq, including the Iraqi Education Ministry. Discussion focused primarily on the problems of educating children - especially girls -- amid violence and uncertainty. While the discussion was for the most part business-like and apolitical, the U.S. was sharply criticized by an academic in the audience who held the US entirely responsible for the situation. In concluding remarks, Sheikha Mozah called for creation of a committee to ensure the conference's recommendations are followed up and announced a meeting in Doha on November 30, 2008 to consider the problems of education in conflict zones more generally. End Summary.

12. A major focus of the conference was how to restore Iraq's educational system and encourage teachers, educators, and students to return to the classroom. Security issues and lack of schools as well as the constant threat of violence were primary topics of the conference. Many of the panelists spoke about the lack of the implementation of a right to education in Iraq, particularly among girls, due to the violence and destruction of school infrastructure. However, achievements were also outlined by several Ministers including improved planning, better international collaboration and the slow return of teachers to the classroom.

13. On the first day of the conference, panel discussions focused on education in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction with discussions on the legal framework of the right to education in conflict countries, the role of the media in advocacy for that right, humanitarian responses in the education sector and post-conflict reconstruction in the education sector. Experts from other post-conflict areas, specifically Afghanistan and Palestine, spoke about the successes they had achieved as well as the challenges and barriers they still had to overcome.

14. One member of the panel, Mr. Saad Jaber, Deputy Director of the Center for North African Studies, spoke about the legal framework of the right to education in conflict. He stated that according to international law, aggression against educators was a crime against humanity but the question was how to enforce this. He stated that first one must document the events. He also said that occupying powers have a certain responsibility to protect educators, not just the Ministry of Defense, because education is a right.

15. During the question and answer period, an academic in the audience attacked the United States as being responsible for the deaths of academics both directly and indirectly, and for preventing students from taking exams due to roadblocks and other barriers that prevented their going to school. She said that American occupying forces are jeopardizing the future of Iraq and should be condemned because they only destroy. She questioned why embargoes are put around cities during final exams, and said that students had been arrested while studying on their roofs when American troops went "parading" by. She stated that Iraqis did not need anyone to show

them how to build an education system but they needed to demonstrate the aggressiveness of the U.S. and give compensation to everyone who was hurt. She concluded that the role of the media is to tell the truth about the occupiers and demanded that an investigation of the deaths of academics be done because, in her view, the Americans were primarily responsible for all of this, and should be forced to pay reparations.

¶6. These comments were received with support and applause. The UNESCO Secretariat looked uncomfortable and tried to keep the meeting under control. Mr. Jaber said that compensation could be looked at for both individuals and institutions, but it would have to be done respecting both national and international law. He recommended an investigative body be established to look into all of this, and that a file be created on all the harm done by the Americans. He ended by saying that any request for compensation had to be done on a diplomatic level. The Minister of Education from Kurdistan commented that we must look to the future not the past because this crisis did not start with the Americans, but with Saddam Hussein who had started all of this and who had closed 4000 schools. There was no response to his comments.

¶7. Recommendations #8 and #10 from the conference (see attachment) specifically address these concerns and are directly aimed at the United States. We are concerned that these two recommendations could lead to problems for the United States in the area of education in Iraq. (Comment: The Iraqi Ambassador to UNESCO told Ambassador Oliver that the academic in the audience (referred to above) should be ignored but the fact remains that two of the recommendations adopted by the conference reflect her concerns and those of Mr. Jaber. End Comment.)

¶8. The second day of the conference was divided into five working groups: access to quality basic education in Iraq; issues facing

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universities in Iraq; the protection of Iraqi intellectuals, academics, teachers, students and educational institutions; educational issues facing internally displaced persons and the implications they have for the Iraqi education system; and, educational issues facing refugees in neighboring countries and their implications on the Iraqi education system. The United States did not attend these working group sessions. On the final day of the conference, draft recommendations from these working groups were presented to the plenary session (see Para #11 below).

¶9. Attendees were primarily officials from the Iraqi Education Ministry, NGO's from neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, and academics representing the university system in Iraq. Very few UNESCO delegations attended the conference, and while the UNESCO headquarters staff was represented among the panelists, it was not directly involved in organizing the conference. Officials of UNESCO's Iraq field office located in Amman, Jordan, took the lead working with Sheikha Mozah and her staff. (Comment: We understand the Sheikha was the prime mover behind this conference, having expressed concerns to UNESCO that she was upset because she did not know how US Dols 15 million she gave UNESCO in 2005 had been spent. End Comment.) In her closing statement, Sheikha Mozah stated that she did not believe that any change had taken place in Iraq to restore the educational system.

¶10. Note: Ambassador Oliver attended the first day of the conference and was welcomed to the conference by the UNESCO Ambassador from Qatar who told her he was glad to see her. However, the former Ambassador to Lebanon who is Lebanon's representative on the UNESCO Executive Board, Ms. Samira Hanna-El-Daher, told Ambassador Oliver that people sitting around her expressed surprise that Ambassador Oliver had attended. Ambassador Oliver asked, "Why shouldn't I be here? It's a UNESCO meeting." The former Lebanese Ambassador agreed with her but still stated that many people in the audience were surprised that Ambassador Oliver had attended the conference. Privately the UN representative told Ambassador Oliver that the United States had been indispensable to his work in education in Iraq but this was not stated publicly.

¶11. In closing the conference, Sheikha Mozah emphasized that neither

Education for All (EFA) goals nor Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) would be achieved if more international attention and financing were not focused on crisis-affected countries.

¶12. Draft recommendations from the conference: "The Paris Conference on the Right to Education in Crisis-Affected Countries: "Stop Jeopardizing the Future of Iraq" follow below:

¶1. Develop a national vision, mission and strategy for education at all levels based on a consultation of all stakeholders, and design policies based on updated, accurate data and relevant studies and analysis.

¶2. The Iraqi Government and international partners need to take urgent measures to increase access to education by:

- Meeting the need for additional schools and classes based on a mapping system, needs assessment, appropriate designs;
 - Expanding formal and non-formal learning Opportunities for out-of-school children, youth and adult illiterates;
- Encourage private sector investment and community involvement in education to complement government efforts in increasing access;

¶3. The Iraqi Government and international partners need to take urgent measures to increase quality of education by:

- Curriculum development;
- Qualification and performance standards for teachers;
- Pre-service and in-service training programmes for teachers;
- Capacity building for improved school management and educational supervision;
- Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning materials and equipment and promoting child-friendly schools;

¶4. The Iraqi government and international partners should help to reform the higher education system by developing and upgrading the curriculum, by using modern technologies, by reviewing legislation concerning university governance, and by providing opportunities for further training for university lecturers;

¶5. Include courses and programmes in Iraqi universities that enhance national identity and principles of citizenship.

¶6. Through consultation with the relevant authorities, encourage the return to Iraq of academics, and benefit from the skills and expertise of Iraqi academics whether inside or outside Iraq.

¶7. With the help of universities in other countries and international organizations, increase the opportunities for Iraqi academics and students to teach, carry out research and study abroad.

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¶8. The international community should explicitly recognize crimes against educators as crimes against humanity or war crimes. An international and independence investigative body should be established with the cooperation of Iraq to investigate all such crimes. Furthermore, a UN rapporteur should be sent to Iraq to investigate.

¶9. Mechanisms should be established in Iraq to ensure the safety and security of educators and students and to create an environment conducive to the return of those who have left. Fundamental to this will be the establishment of the neutrality of educational institutions through transparency and neutral curricula and administrative processes.

¶10. The Government of Iraq should implement national laws and prosecute all perpetrators under existing legislation and give compensation and ongoing support to the families of assassinated educators.

¶11. UNESCO should advocate for a campaign to protect education personnel and the education system.

¶12. To permit continuity of schooling for IDP children, use testing and referral systems or other temporary measures to permit students who have lost school certificates to continue schooling;

¶13. Expanding access to schooling for IDP children by expanding facilities, providing transport, offering teacher training to members of the IDP community in areas that host large numbers of IDPs;

¶14. Provide guidelines for short-term and emergency responses to local actors (NGOs and community organizations) on measures to be taken according to the minimum accepted standards;

¶15. Address, in coordination between the central Iraqi government and the KRG government, factors that hinder school attendance: discrimination, language barriers, lack of appropriate outreach to IDP communities to inform them of services (redrafting);

¶16. UN agencies, NGOs, donors should help increase enrollment by Iraqi refugee children by providing financial and material support in the form of school uniforms, textbooks, school supplies, free transportation, waiver of school fees/donations, and Conditional Cash Transfers as applicable;

¶17. Donors, UN agencies, and host governments should continue to help build the capacity and resources of the Ministries of Education to address needs of refugee;

¶18. With the help of international partners, encourage and enable Ministries of Education to address issues of certification including cross-border examinations and accreditation systems;

¶19. UN agencies, NGOs and host governments should make a concerted effort to create or strengthen child protection networks, mechanisms and institutions, notably through in or order to:

- Raise awareness among teachers and the general public about the psychosocial issues impacting Iraqi refugees;
- Provide training and support to teachers, counselors and community religious leaders on appropriate responses with children;
- Provide family counseling and discussion/support groups;

¶20. International and national partners should broaden the means of access to learning through e-learning and ICTs.

OLIVER